

ordered compiled in order to promote consciousness of Confucian ethics. This work, entitled "The Three Bonds and True Examples of their Practice, with Illustrations" (*Samgang haengsil to*), was concerned with the three basic Confucian relationships: those between parents and children, seniors and juniors, and husband and wife. Three hundred and thirty inspiring stories exemplifying these "three bonds" were culled from Chinese and Korean history and rewritten in Chinese versions, each filling a single printed page. But Sejong clearly saw the essential problem: if the people could not read Chinese, how could they be uplifted by the stories? Adding an illustration for each story was helpful but hardly met the difficulty, as the king acknowledged. "Since the common people generally do not know Chinese characters," he lamented, "even when this book is distributed how will they be able to act upon it unless someone shows them how to read it? ... Let everyone, in the capital and out, exert themselves in the arts of teaching and instruction; let everyone seek out people of learning and sophistication, without regard to class status, strongly urging them to teach people to read, not excluding women of all ages ... May the hearts of the people profit by morning and advance by evening, let there be none who do not feel an opening of their natural goodness."

What Sejong evidently had in mind at that time was a kind of nationwide tutorial in the text of "The Three Bonds." His prescription followed the traditional Korean reading pedagogy for Chinese: using Sino-Korean pronunciation, one teaches the student to pronounce a Chinese text out loud; the student then memorizes it and absorbs instruction on its meaning; and as the same procedure is repeated with more and more texts, he or she gradually learns to read. While Sejong's wishes were noble enough, he himself surely realized that they were unrealistic. The

idea for a new and different approach – the direct promotion of national literacy through the creation of a national phonetic script – may indeed have been conceived at this time. In any case, we know for certain that a decade later, within a few weeks of his announcement of the alphabet, Sejong was talking of a Korean translation of "The Three Bonds."

However that may be, no sign of any work on the alphabet is evident during those nine or ten years. But in late 1443 or early 1444, Sejong suddenly announced to his court that he had completed a phonetic script of twenty-eight letters which could be functionally classified as "initial, medial, or terminal sounds" and arranged in syllabic groups. Soon after this we hear of a demonstration class of clerks being assembled to learn the script, printing technicians preparing alphabetic textual material (unfortunately not described), the launching of a major research inquiry into the phonology of a Chinese riming dictionary, *Yun hui* (compiled 1292), and of course the plans for "The Three Bonds" in Korean. These announcements had a powerful effect on the capital; indeed, they precipitated a political crisis.